

What Is a Conservancy?

A conservancy is a State agency, created by California law, which is designed to focus State policy support and funding for efforts to protect and restore natural resources and to create public access opportunities within a particular region of the State.

Conservancies have played a significant role in resource protection within the State for over three decades. There are nine conservancies (if the Sierra Nevada Conservancy is approved) that have been created by statute. The use of conservancies is a unique feature of California's resource management efforts (although its experience has been utilized in other parts of the country).

Conservancies attempt to bring resource programs closer to regional problems (e.g., shorten the lines of communication and decision-making timeframes and to allow for more responsiveness to problems and partnership opportunities); to comprehensively deal with multiple resource objectives within a watershed or groups of watersheds (not limited by park or refuge boundaries); and to provide opportunities for key partners and implementing entities to participate in the decision-making process. Such participation builds support for conservancy programs.

Each conservancy is governed by a board that includes representatives from key State policy (Resources Agency) and/or funding agencies (Department of Finance); representatives from each house of the Legislature; and usually representatives of local government, which play key roles in developing and implementing programs and projects. The conservancy boards are unusual because they provide a direct role for local government in resource management decision-making. Representatives of Federal agencies are often placed on the board (in an ex-officio and non-voting capacity) in order to facilitate the coordination of programs between the State and Federal government. Board meetings also provide an ongoing opportunity for the public to gain access to the decision-making process.

The conservancies utilize acquisition, restoration and/or land management activities to achieve their program objectives. They do not exercise regulatory authority over land uses.

The operational style of the conservancies emphasizes collaboration and cooperation through "willing-seller" acquisitions and grants to other public agencies or non-profit organizations based on voluntary applications.